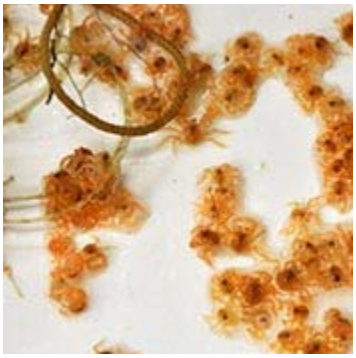
August 2014

AKCRRAB conducts experimental release of red king crabs in Kodiak



Juvenile red king crabs freshly removed from their holding tank and ready to be counted and released. Click image for larger version [3.5 MB].

Researchers Eric Munk and Pete Cummiskey suit up in preparation to release juvenile red king crab in Trident Basin, Kodiak. Click image for larger version [3.1 MB].

On August 4, 2014, NOAA researchers at the Kodiak Laboratory released 11,250 juvenile red king crabs into Trident Basin, near Kodiak. The juveniles used in this experimental release were hatched from broodstock (seven adult females) captured in Alitak Bay, Kodiak Island, in collaboration with Rick Metzger and Mitch Simeonoff from Ahkiok, Jeff Hetrick of the Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery, and NOAA scientists. The egg-bearing females were shipped to Seward where aquaculture specialists at the Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery held them and reared the larvae to the juvenile stage. The juveniles were then shipped back to Kodiak for the release.

Over the past few years, habitat and juvenile distribution surveys were conducted near the city of Kodiak, Old Harbor, and Alitak Bay. The surveys were used to identify potential release sites with good habitat complexity and an absence of natural red king crab settlement. In fall 2013, researchers released and followed about 5,000 hatchery-reared juveniles in Cozy Cove near the village of Old Harbor.

The 2014 release is an experiment to test how well hatchery-reared crabs survive in the wild and what factors affect their survival. Since crab density can have a strong effect on survival, crabs were released at 25, 50, and 75 per square meter. Crabs were released by divers into 5 x 5 meter quadrats marked with ground-line, and researchers are monitoring their survival and movement outside the release areas. The results should give researchers an idea of the optimal density to release red king crabs to maximize survival. This project represents a significant step forward for AKCRRAB, which has brought together collaborators from

the fishing industry, Native groups, coastal Alaska communities, and state and federal agencies. Scientists have worked closely with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game throughout the broodstock collection and outstocking experiment, with collection and transport permits.

News Flash is edited by Asia Beder and Ginny Eckert. AKCRRAB, the Alaska King Crab Research, Rehabilitation and Biology Program, is sponsored by Alaska Sea Grant, UAF School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, NOAA Fisheries, the Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery, community groups, and industry members.

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